

Exhibit No. 7

Date 2-7-07

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee,

I'm Steve Akre – AKRE – chief medical officer of the Great Falls Clinic. On behalf of our 134 providers and 750 employees I want to add our support for SB 312, which will prohibit hospitals from using economic competitive factors in their decision process of renewing or granting privileges to physicians in their communities.

Only 2 communities in the entire state have truly competing hospitals today – everywhere else a doctor has a single choice as to where he cares for his patients who are sick enough to need in-patient care. If a hospital can use competitive factors as criteria in allowing a physician to practice, communities will surely lose doctors and their patients will suffer. Recruiting new physicians to our state is a challenge as it is.

In Great Falls my partners have taken personal financial risk in bringing a number of new innovations and services to our community. A couple of examples are illustrative. After several years of encouraging our local hospital to invest in upgrades for our radiation therapy technologies, and having the hospital pull out of an agreement to address this together, we opened a state of the art cancer center in August of 2005 that rivals any center in the state. About seven years ago, after trying for years to get our hospital to upgrade its dialysis equipment, we determined to support a private company to build a center. This led to an immediate decision by our hospital to commit to required updates, and today we have a great facility at Benefis.

Physicians will press for improvement and innovation on behalf of their patients. They will partner where appropriate, but move forward on their own if they have to.

This innovation and pressure to improve quality will be stifled by a hospital that does economic credentialing. Opposition to this bill demonstrates intent to prohibit competition. Our patients want any competition that improves the value of their healthcare experience and offers genuine choice: things that increase quality, improve access, enhance the level of customer service, or lower cost.

Please support this bill on behalf of the patients – the citizens of Montana who we are all so fortunate to serve.

Thank you for your attention –

Steven Akre MD

